TL 2912

Situation on East Timor

Under the auspices of the SG of the UN a dialogue between Portugal and Indonesia about East-Timor is taking place already for years. Indonesia annexed this area in 1975 after Portugal had left it in a situation of civil war. It does not look as if these talks will soon lead to a result. The Netherlands are neutral as they look after the interests of Portugal in Indonesia. The situation of human rights was in 1989 worse than in former years because of an excessive violence by the Indonesian army (50 dead) between April and August. Three incidents took also place (during the visit of the Pope in October 1989, around the house of the Bishop of Dili, Mgr. Belo in November and during the visit of the American Ambassador, Monjo, in January 1990). Some students were arrested and probably mistreated, but later on released. The situation remains tense.

Positive developments are the opening of the Island (early 1989), resulting in an increasing number of visitors also from abroad; the changes in the military sphere (the military commander as well as the Chief of the security police - both responsible for the excessive military action- were replaced); as well as the commando structure (East Timor came under the direct command of the military authorities in Jakarta) The ICRC which had experienced difficulties during the last period, could restart its activities.

The social-economic situation is a mixture of progress (especially in the field of the infrastructure and education) and arrearage (especially the economic situation of the rural population). The Indonesian government makes an effort to improve the situation. The Church authorities are also very active in close collaboration with the mainly religious NGS's. It is also a positive factor that there is a good relation between the church authorities in Dili with those in Jakarta.

The Dutch government gives financial support to the activities of the ICRC and Unicef on behalf of East-Timor.